

# Labor and the Machine



From the cover design for the June "New Masses" by Hugo Gellert

## REBIRTH OF "NEW MASSES"

### Gold Now Editor; June Issue Is Lively

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Reviewed by A. B. MAGIL.

THE *New Masses* died in April and has been reborn in June—a lusty infant. The fact that few people realized that the *New Masses* had ceased to exist shows how feeble its voice had become during its declining days.

Starting a little over two years ago with loud fanfare and an enthusiastic crowd of proletarian intellectuals—ex-*Masses* and *Liberator* readers—ready to push from behind, the *New Masses* soon began hitting the rocks. Too much water had flown under the political bridge. Ten years ago, even five years ago, the orientation of the liberals was towards the revolutionary camp. But class distinctions have become sharper. The attempt to run the *New Masses* as a coalition between liberals and revolutionists, with the revolutionists pulling the confused and spluttering liberals desperately to the left, ended in disaster. A compromise was effected which was in reality a reductio ad absurdum: Egmont Arens, who was not fervently on either side—neither fish nor fowl—became sole editor. And to prove that he was redder than any of the Reds, Arens went in heavily for *Hoch-Politik*. And he began to sway unsteadily between open counter-revolution (Dorothy Wong on the Chinese Revolution) to concealed counter-revolution (the neo-revisionism of Max Eastman). Result: worse disaster and complete estrangement of the *New Masses* from its only real reading public—"the intellectual vanguard of the workingclass."

Personally, I was praying fervently during those last few months that the thing would die and would stay dead.

It died. It didn't stay dead.

THE new editor of the *New Masses* is Michael Gold. This is likely to mean certain things. One of them: that the *New Masses* will have more

than a nominal connection with the American workingclass. Another: that the liberals have finally been tossed over the wall into the waiting arms of Oswald Garrison Villard and Herbert Croly. Still another: that in the course of time the *New Masses* may lose a few of its classy wisecracks and acquire something else.

The most strategic reform instituted by the new editor has been the cutting of the price from 25 to 15 cents. It makes a world of difference. That dime is a healthy shove towards the only reading public that matters—the workingclass.

The new *New Masses* is still a hybrid. Building upon ruins is a tough job. I move that a society be formed for the suppression of Alfred Kreymborg. And Ezra Pound's contribution to Leninism is idiotic. Sentences contradict each other, ideas with a specific gravity below zero gape in midair. Pound should stick to his cantos.

But there are other things that offer hope and point a way. "An effort will be made to enlist the great submerged unpublished voices of America," says an editorial note. Mike Gold makes good this promise in the first number under his direction. There is an entire page of the first published poems of Martin Ruskak, a young Patterson silk weaver. There is the remarkable *Poorhouse Anthology* by an inmate of one of these ornaments of capitalist civilization. And then the *Letters from America*, from workers all over the country—"a sublimated Workers' Correspondence."

Dudley Nichols' description of animal-killing in a Chicago stockyard is superb. Perhaps too well done. The phrases too glittering, their beauty too hard and cruel.

And best of all: Mike Gold's chapter from his book of East Side memoirs, *Jews Without Money*. Work such as this is in the direction of what may some day be American proletarian literature.

## FIGHTING TERROR

By S. KAEMRAD

VERA is fire and flame for Enthusiasm and energy from her letters. Her letters than personal, their significance that of human documents, power and interest. In counter the dangers of the sorship, Vera wrote her letters in the language of Aesop:

"What shall I write about? I am living as before. Life and I taste of it with eager enthusiasm. Now as before, tremendously happy, but side with the happiness there is much pain. The circumstances existence are so hard, so the consideration is paid to the intentions and wishes of the people. Life has become terrific. The emigration which ways considerable has now a tremendous degree. Those us and those far away are gations and friends are among. They are going in groups and individuals. It is particularly full when whole groups go. Time. Life then becomes much difficult . . .

"The emigration is particularly strong amongst the youth. The energy and activity of youth is particularly difficult for them, mainly inactive and wait for times. They therefore leave us for a long time . . .

"For the present I have no intention of leaving myself. With energy and my hunger for work, I want to overcome the unpleasant circumstances. I want to stay just where I will, and to do it I want to do. Well, we shall see."

It is not difficult to understand that with "emigrants" Vera and those comrades who have been arrested. And that she is ready to police raids and arrests and misfortunes so well known to those who have ever worked illegally.

The Polish secret police are searching for Vera for a very long time. They were only waiting for the opportunity to settle with her.

As though she had a presentiment of her coming capture she wrote a letter:

"Our life is now more stormy than ever before. Our count for months and the for years. Not according to length, but certainly according to fullness of the events containing them. Think of it, we are in August 1925. You know that means. And in this month August I am writing you a letter can hardly believe my eyes are How beautiful! How splendid expected and unusual!"

The following month of September proved fatal for Vera. The arrests which swept over Western Russia in the fall of 1925 drew her too into the vortex. Vera had not there where she wanted but there where she was seized by the Polish secret police, in But even there, behind thick walls and surrounded by a living of bayonets she retained the calmness and the laughter of youth. Agents of Pilsudski could not take that away from her no matter bad the conditions of life in the prison were.

On the contrary: "The prison is a bagatelle!", she writes in a letter to friends outside. "It is not so difficult to achieve its aim, but it works wonders in strengthening our determination and bolshevism."

She writes further: "I am not bored. I don't know what boredom is. I do know what both pleasure and anger are. Sometimes I could be angry with teeth in fury. But that is not so. I am able, and is quickly compensated by deep pleasure. The thoughts of the future are dreams. But in its way the present is beautiful. I am living this life as it is, it seems to me that I ever loved life before."

Thus writes a girl who has almost three years in prison. She has been sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment in a trial which has already taken place and in the of the "133" she is threatened with a further 8 years.

And despite this prospect of living the best years of her life in prison she still can find enough to joke:

"How I long to see you all!"